



# NORTH VALLEY ALONG THE GRIEGOS DRAIN

WALKING TOUR



## A WALK FOR ALL SEASONS

A walk along the Griegos Drain offers a semi-rural experience in the heart of a major city, traversing layers of geologic and human history.

In winter, great flocks of birds enliven tones of gray and tan. Sandhill cranes, snow geese, Canada geese, ducks, and pheasants are joined by the occasional coyote looking for a meal.

Spring sees the delicate green of sprouting alfalfa, the leafing of giant cottonwoods, and the pink and white of fragrant fruit tree blossoms.

Summer brings the rich green of ditch vegetation and field crops, with hummingbirds hovering over the water to snag insects. The nearby Los Ranchos Growers' Market fills shopping bags with fresh produce, flowers, baked goods and crafts. Watch for the wildly popular annual lavender festival in July.

In fall, the fields of Los Poblanos Open Space are transformed into an elaborate corn maze. Explorers of all ages wander the pathways, seeking their goal. Golden cottonwoods surround the yellowing fields. Clear blue October skies may be filled with the sight and sounds of hot air balloons.

THE EARLIEST RESIDENTS WERE  
ANCESTORS OF PUEBLO TRIBES WHO  
FARMED HERE 1,500 YEARS AGO.

Gates, wheels, check structures, and other facilities of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) are visible throughout this area. The MRGCD was formed in the 1920s to drain the Valley's waterlogged lands, reclaim them for agriculture and provide irrigation water and flood control. Today MRGCD manages over 300 miles of ditches and drains in Bernalillo County, incorporating acequias into the larger management system. The banks of these ditches and drains form a network of informal pathways and the ditch vegetation creates an oasis in the desert throughout the valley.

The ditches are home to frogs and toads, crayfish and water striders, ducks and geese, skunks and raccoons, willows and horsetail grass. It was here that wild food advocate, Euell Gibbons, stalked the wild asparagus.

The land adjacent to the ditch banks has been settled and cultivated for centuries. The earliest residents were ancestors of Pueblo tribes who farmed here 1,500 years ago. Later, Spanish colonists established their own villages. In the twentieth century, the area became a place for fruit orchards, a dairy and, finally, suburban development.

The walks along the ditches offer grand vistas of the Sandia Mountains to the east and Albuquerque's five extinct volcanoes to the west. The ditch paths make connections to a wealth of community destinations. The southern route provides access to a popular café, a bookstore, and a museum. Walking west of the Open Space takes you to a vineyard. Walking north leads you to an elementary school, the Village of Los Ranchos hall, and a developed park.

## SAFETY

Practice caution when walking along and across the drain, the ditches, and roadways.

The ditches and drains are both inviting and dangerous for children. New Mexicans have traditionally used tales of La Llorona (the crying woman) to frighten children away from ditch play. The ghost of La Llorona is said to roam the ditches at night searching for her drowned children. Be careful to keep children and pets away from the edges of the drain and ditch banks and especially away from locations where water passes through pipes.

The bridge across the Gallegos Lateral next to Alvarado Elementary School is narrow, with steps.

Traversing the entire route requires crossing Montaño Road, which is a busy thoroughfare that lacks protective crosswalks. Some cars travel very fast and gaps in the traffic stream may be infrequent. You may well choose to walk only along portions of the route either north or south of Montaño to avoid crossing the street.



## GRIEGOS DRAIN WALKING TOUR



P LOS RANCHOS  
VILLAGE CENTER  
& HARTNETT PARK



P PARKING

▲ ABQ RIDE BUS STOP

■ NORTH WALKING ROUTE

■ SOUTH WALKING ROUTE

◆ BRIDGE

## NORTH ROUTE MONTAÑO ROAD TO CHAVEZ ROAD

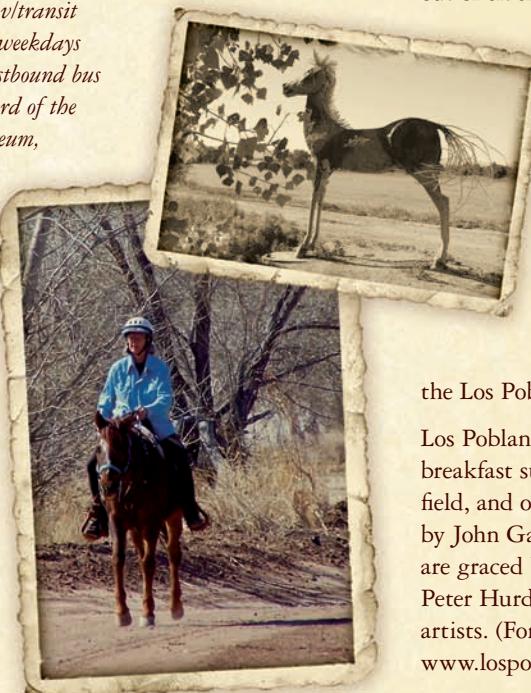
Approximately 2 mile round trip

**Parking:** This route begins at Los Poblanos Open Space parking area, north of Montaño and just east of Shepherd of the Valley Church. Or, if starting at the north end, it's possible to park either at Hartnett Park (adjacent to Los Ranchos Village Hall, a park path connects the Village Center to Chavez Road) or along the Griegos Drain, adjacent to Alvarado Elementary School.

**Bus Access:** ABQ Ride Bus Route #157 serves Montaño Road (visit [www.abq.gov/transit](http://www.abq.gov/transit) to obtain schedule information) on weekdays and Saturdays. Westbound and eastbound bus stops are located adjacent to Shepherd of the Valley Church and the Unser Museum, respectively. Be careful crossing Montaño Road!

Beginning at Los Poblanos Open Space parking lot »1«, follow the foot path west along the north side of Shepherd of the Valley Church »2«. The 138-acre Los Poblanos farm was purchased by the citizens of Albuquerque in 1998 and is managed by the City's Open Space Division. There are several trails along ditches and farm roads. The trail described here is located along the Griegos Drain.

A majestic cottonwood »3« gives shade to picnickers and provides an excellent vantage point for hungry hawks. In the spring, children anticipate the formation of cottonwood seed pods (tetones or "tick-tack-tonies") to use them as game pieces



or ammo for pea shooters. Later, the bursting pods pop and release blizzards of cottony seeds.

A walk northward along the drain will reward you with views of open farmland and the Sandia Mountains. The Sandias rise to a height of 10,378 feet and were formed by a shift and uplift that caused what was once a sea floor to rise to great heights. Seashell fossils can be found on the top of the mountains.

Albuquerque's five extinct volcanoes (Vulcan, JA, Black, Butte, and Bond) are visible to the west. The volcanoes are an example of fissure eruptions that oozed magma out of cracks in the earth's crust over a distance of five miles. These young basaltic cones were formed from spatter and thin lava flows.

A small bridge »4« crosses the drain at Anderson Valley Vineyards »5«. The vineyard was founded by balloonist Maxie Anderson and his wife, Patty. (For information on tasting and tours, visit [www.nmwine.com/wineries/andersonvalley](http://www.nmwine.com/wineries/andersonvalley).) West of the winery and Rio Grande Boulevard is the Los Poblanos Inn and Cultural Center »6«.

Los Poblanos Inn and Cultural Center is a bed and breakfast surrounded by majestic gardens, a lavender field, and organic farm. The buildings were designed by John Gaw Meem and have a rich history. They are graced by the handiwork of Gustave Baumann, Peter Hurd, and several other fine New Mexico artists. (For information about tours, visit [www.lospoblanos.com](http://www.lospoblanos.com).)

A fanciful metal horse created by local artist O.K. Harris stands along the drain and shares your view. You may also encounter live horses. Stop and ask their riders how to proceed.

Be on the lookout for horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*, also called "shavegrass"), which flourishes near the water. It is a perennial, flowerless plant with hollow,

jointed stems. Considered one of the oldest plants on the planet, it has many medicinal uses. Along the ditches, dragonflies commonly use it as a landing post.

At the north end of the fields, you will encounter the community gardens of the Rio Grande Community Farms »[7](#)«, a not-for-profit group that manages Los Poblanos Fields. The group's sustainable agricultural methods help preserve habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. Education programs and service learning projects are among the activities that take place here. Anyone can rent rows in the garden to plant vegetables, fruits or flowers.

Abundant birds and animals share the area, in part because the kids at Alvarado Elementary School »[8](#)« maintain a small wildlife preserve here. The kids keep a tally of birds sighted and welcome your additions to their list. Roadrunners, the comics of the cuckoo family, are plentiful along the Gallegos Lateral adjacent to the school.

Retrace your steps to your starting point, or explore another of the many options for walking in the Open Space.

## SOUTH ROUTE: GRIEGOS ROAD TO MONTAÑO ROAD

Approximately 1 mile round trip

**Parking:** Parking is very limited for this segment.

**Bus Access:** ABQ Ride Bus Route #36 runs westbound along Griegos Road. Visit [www.cabq.gov/transit](http://www.cabq.gov/transit) to obtain schedule and route information.

The southern route begins where the Griegos Drain crosses Griegos Road »[A](#)«, a few hundred feet east of Rio Grande Boulevard.

The name of the street and drain are derived from the Griego family. Juan Griego, a native of Greece, joined Juan de Oñate in 1597 and came to New Mexico. A



farming village bearing his name formed near the Rio Grande. Names on mailboxes along Griegos Road tell you that his descendants still live in the area.

From Griegos Road, walk north along the drain. Looking west, you may catch a glimpse of a traditional Navajo hogan, an eight-sided structure of overlapping logs, an east-facing door, and domed roof. It is now nearly obscured by a collection of car hulks. Many homes abut the drain. Some of the oldest homes have been around for a century or more and endured floods of the Rio Grande until the 1940s, when levees and dams were built to control the river.

A short westerly detour along Dietz Place will take you to Flying Star Plaza »[B](#)«, home to a collection of unusual locally-owned shops. Among them are a fine bookstore and popular café where you can tie up your horse or dog while sipping coffee or dining on the patio.

The Griegos Drain crosses the narrower Griegos Lateral on a new bridge »[C](#)«. The design of the metal work railings echoes the surrounding trees. From here, you can turn west to walk to Rio Grande Valley State Park. The park includes 16 miles of paved trail running along the river levee. The levee system encompasses the world's largest cottonwood forest ("bosque") and a vast riparian habitat. Channels recently constructed within the bosque have created homes for the endangered silvery minnow.

Ahead to your right are the Unser Racing Museum »[D](#)« and Cottonwood Classical Preparatory School. The museum building is shaped like a wheel. The exhibition rooms are spokes that display the history, design and engineering of race cars. Members of the Unser family have won races over a period spanning several decades. (For information, visit [www.unserracingmuseum.com](http://www.unserracingmuseum.com).)

Return along the drain to your starting place or explore other connections.

## WALKING CONDITIONS

The walk can be divided into two segments, north and south of Montaño. Both segments are well suited to walking your dog, exploring with children, or riding horses.

The pathways along the drain consist of packed dirt that is generally passable for most wheelchairs. Pathways along the ditches may be softer. After rain or snow, or if irrigation of Los Poblanos fields overflows, the drain and the ditches will become very muddy and may remain wet for several days. Wet patches of clay may be slippery for feet, hooves and wheels.

Summertime walking in this area offers little shade, so you may wish to go early or later in the day. Be sure to wear a hat and sunscreen, and take water.



## THANK YOU

A heartfelt thanks to Kathy Chilton and others, who collaborated with Claude Morelli and Diane Scena of WALK Albuquerque to create this walking guide. WALK Albuquerque is dedicated to creating and preserving safe, attractive, and accessible walking for transportation, health and recreation through education and advocacy. For information about our activities and projects and to download other walking guides, please visit our website, [www.walkalbuquerque.org](http://www.walkalbuquerque.org)

Supporters include the Urban Enhancement Trust Fund of the City of Albuquerque, the NM Department of Transportation and the Albuquerque Historical Society.



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### RESOURCES:

Photos courtesy of Kathy Chilton and City of Albuquerque Open Space.

Please respect the privacy and wishes of adjacent homeowners, occupants and neighbors. The ditches, drains, and banks are maintained primarily by MRGCD for irrigation, drainage and flood control. Smaller laterals may be community owned.